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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001597

SIPDIS

FOR AF ASSISTANT SECRETARY NEWMAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EFIN](#) [KCOR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON MEETING PROBLEMS

REF: A. STATE 146118

[1](#)B. ABUJA 1323

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

[1](#)1. (C) It seems we may be getting to the point of diminishing returns on the many invitations to GON officials, especially the Economic Dream Team, for participation in meetings outside Nigeria. We delivered the October 4 G8 transparency/anti-corruption follow-up meeting invitation (Ref A) on September 14 to Finance Minister Ngozi's office, which has passed it to Ngozi. We have no response from Ngozi, but GON anti-corruption czar Oby Ezekwesili met with Poloffs September 16, and was very downbeat.

[1](#)2. (C) Oby said the GON would probably send her, not Ngozi, and asked if the G8 meeting could be postponed. She noted that the GON had not really come to grips with putting together the Technical Action Plan for the October 4 meeting would address (despite the August 6 POTUS letter to President Obasanjo asking the GON to work its Plan with economic officials at the October 4 meeting), but most of her unhappiness was that she had to be at three other international meetings in different countries that week. We have explained that the G8 meeting cannot be postponed, as it was scheduled to get officials from all the G8 countries and the four transparency/anti-corruption pilot countries together around UNGA and World Bank meetings, but her complaints had resonance for a different reason.

[1](#)3. (C) We are not suggesting that the October 4 meeting be rescheduled; Nigerian participation in the G8 transparency/anti-corruption program is important. There is a more general issue. Inviting the Economic Dream Team to a continuing high volume of meetings may run two related risks. The first is that they promote confusion within the GON as to what our priorities are. For example, in addition to the anti-corruption meeting, the Department is also inviting other senior Nigerians to another set of meetings that same October 4 in Washington about NEPAD. We know which is more important, but the Nigerians could be forgiven for not understanding our priorities -- and also that it is the GON's actions in Nigeria that are most important, rather than attendance at meetings outside the country.

[1](#)4. (C) The second risk is that inviting senior Nigerians to so many meetings outside Nigeria may promote confusion within the GON, and Nigerian society, as to what the GON's priorities are. As I touched upon in Ref B, there already seems to be some suspicion outside the GON that its economic reforms are designed to improve its standing abroad, rather than being about meaningful socio-economic change. Not only is it distracting for Nigeria's Economic Dream Team to spend so much of its time outside Nigeria instead of inside Nigeria working on Nigeria's problems, but it also reinforces perceptions here that economic reform is primarily to impress foreigners. We may need to be more cautious about how often we invite to Washington high level members of Nigeria's economic reform team.

CAMPBELL